[247 cont.]

[448] The weakness of their power and their frequent dissensions are still [439 579] almost unsurmountable obstacles to the security of trade, and even to this day they make it impossible to make the caravan routes used by the merchants of Tashkent, Kokand, or their eastern neighbors perfectly safe. As for communications with the Bukharans and the Khivans, Russia has another route, that of the Caspian Sea. Before the hordes acknowledged themselves vassals of the empire, it was the only route which served Russia for its trade with Persia and Central Asia. Catherine was not slow to turn her attention to this matter, and having rejected useless hopes from the promises of the Kazak princes, which were both empty and pompous, she wished [248] to concentrate all the commercial relations of her subjects with Khiva and the dominion of Bukhara in Astrakhan. But this plan was not carried out, on the one hand because the Asiatics did not find it advantageous for them, and [316] on the other hand because it threatened Orenburg, Troitsk, and all the copper and iron mines established in their environs with complete ruin.

[439] Nevertheless the intentions of the Russian government with regard to trade with Central Asia did not prevent it from supporting the exchange of goods with the Kazaks in every way possible. [712] At first this was only done at Orenburg, while later it was begun at Troitsk and, in 1764, at the fort of Semipalatinsk. This last fort was designated for this purpose on the entreaty of Sultan Abulfenz, son of the famous khan, Abul Mahmet, and brother of Polat, khan of Turkestan. In the Middle Horde he was in command of the powerful Naiman descent group. He was independent, but camped in the former lands of the Dzungars, which had made him seek the protection of the emperor of China. [439] Having never sworn loyalty to Russia nor had relations with her, he was able, without deception, to send a respectable elder to the authorities of the Siberian border to plead that his subjects have the liberty of trading with the Russians in Semipalatinsk. And this was immediately granted to him.

[342 177] At this time Sultan Ablai requested the Russian government to send him ten tillers of the soil to teach his Kazaks agriculture. [66] Catherine gave orders to satisfy his request, after having taken